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Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003

Implementation of the provisions of resolution 56/242 on pattern of conferences

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

On 27 March 2002, the General Assembly adopted resolution 56/254 D, in which it requested the Secretary-General to present proposals for the implementation of the provisions of resolution 56/242 of 24 December 2001, within the resources specified in resolutions 56/254 A, B and C of 24 December 2001, for consideration and action during the second part of the fifty-sixth session.

The analysis of the existing capacity of the departments and offices involved in the servicing of conferences and meetings of the United Nations organs and of the level of resources established for the biennium 2002-2003 by resolutions 56/254 A, B and C indicated that the Organization did not have sufficient financial resources to maintain services for the conferences and meetings at the level of the previous biennium.

During the biennium 2002-2003, the Secretariat will continue to provide the services to the conferences and meetings at the scope and level detailed in ST/IC/2002/13.

* The present report is being submitted for consideration and action during the second part of the fifty-sixth session, in response to General Assembly resolution 56/254 D of 27 March 2002.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 56/254 D, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to present proposals to implement the provisions of resolution 56/242, within the resources specified in resolutions 56/254 A, B and C, for consideration and action during the second part of its fifty-sixth session. The present report is submitted in response to that resolution. The report contains an analysis of the ability of the departments and offices involved in servicing the conferences and meetings of the United Nations organs to meet, within available servicing capacity, the requirements of the programme of conferences and meetings for the biennium 2002-2003. It also contains proposals for the implementation of the specific provisions of resolution 56/242.

2. Resolution 56/242 contains, inter alia, certain provisions, the implementation of which depend on the level of the established capacity of the departments and offices servicing the United Nations meetings and conferences and on the volume of resources approved by the General Assembly in the context of the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. In particular, within the context of resolution 56/242, the General Assembly:

(a) Approved the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2002-2003, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences, taking into account the observations of the Committee and subject to the provisions of resolution 56/242 (sect. I, para. 1);

(b) Emphasized the importance of providing adequate conference-servicing resources to all United Nations conference centres, for the effective and efficient discharge of their mandates (sect. II, para. 9);

(c) Reiterated that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority (sect. II, para. 17);

(d) Decided to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2002-2003 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groups, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice (sect. II, para. 18);

(e) Noted with concern the delay in the issuance of verbatim and summary records and, in this regard, requested the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures to ameliorate the situation (sect. III, para. 13);

(f) Requested the Secretary-General to study the possibility of further measures in this regard, including enhanced cooperation between the production of press releases by the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat and the preparation of summary records by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, bearing in mind the different nature of press releases and summary records (sect. III, para. 14).

3. In the same resolution, the General Assembly, aiming at the full and most efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities, inter alia: reaffirmed the headquarters rule for the holding of meetings of United Nations bodies; requested the Secretary-General to enhance further the established practice of workload sharing among duty stations in documentation services as a means to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources; and also requested the

Secretary-General, bearing in mind the recent organizational changes, to ensure that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services is considered the appropriate executive authority to oversee, coordinate and enhance the global management and delivery of United Nations conference services, under the legislative authority of the General Assembly and through oversight and examination by the Committee on Conferences.

4. Conference and common support services to meetings of United Nations bodies is provided, as appropriate, by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services at all United Nations-established offices, by the Office of Central Support Services at Headquarters and by local administrative services at other United Nations-established locations, including the regional commissions. Furthermore, the Department of Public Information provides for public information coverage (press, television and radio) of United Nations meetings, in particular those of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Department of Public Information, while not directly contributing support to the intergovernmental meetings, is the most expedient source of information on the activities of the Organization for Member States and their Permanent Missions, and, as such, serves as an essential source of information for the Permanent Missions in the planning of their work.

II. Analysis of the established capacity of the Secretariat regarding the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations approved by resolution 56/242

5. It will be recalled that, by its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly decided to reduce the level of resources available to the Organization during the biennium 2002-2003 by $75,234,300. No specific provision for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, as specified in paragraph 18 of section II of resolution 56/242, has been included by the General Assembly in the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. At the same time, in resolution 56/242, the General Assembly approved the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2002-2003, which had been prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of the proposed programme budget for 2002-2003 and subsequently endorsed by the Committee on Conferences (A/56/52, annex). The Secretariat, therefore, has been assigned the task of implementing resolution 56/242 in the current biennium with significantly reduced servicing capacity.

6 With regard to the above three organizational units involved in servicing and coverage of the United Nations conferences and meetings, the application of decisions on the budget cuts contained in resolution 56/253 is detailed as follows:

	Proposed programme budget for 2002-2003	*Total level of reductions*		*Within the total reductions: non-staff operational costs reductions*	
	Thousands of United States dollars	*Thousands of United States dollars*	*Percentage*[a]	*Thousands of United States dollars*	*Percentage*[b]
Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (sect. 2)	445 054.9	8 481.5	1.9	3 080.5	3.0
Department of Public Information (sect. 26)	146 982.9	5 828.1	3.9	4 448.1	10.6
Department of Management (total sect. 27)	453 777.7	32 141.5	7.0	28 545.2	12.8
Other departments and offices	1 603 900.1	28 783.2	1.8	16 311.5	3.0
Total programme budget	**2 648 715.6**	**75 234.3**	**2.8**	**52 385.6**	**5.7**

[a] Against the proposed programme budget as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/56/6).

[b] Against the non-post operational component of the proposed programme budget as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/56/7).

7. The approved level of resources for the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the biennium 2002-2003 has been analysed against the programme of the United Nations conferences and meetings approved by resolution 56/242 in comparison with actual programme delivery and budget performance for the last 10 years. The analysis, detailed in the annex to the present report, concludes that the steadily increasing programme of conferences and meetings has been accommodated from within the stagnant level of resources of the Department, largely through the introduction and implementation of technological enhancements in conference-servicing processes. The reduction of average actual costs per meeting over that period indicates an increase in the productivity of the Department. The situation has drastically changed during the biennium 2000-2001. The number of serviced meetings held during the biennium 2000-2001 totalled 31,667, and at the time of budget preparation, was projected at 32,929 for the biennium 2002-2003. When compared to the total of 29,767 meetings serviced by the Department during the biennium 1998-1999, the number of meetings is higher by 6.4 per cent and 11.6 per cent, respectively. At the same time, the related conference-servicing costs in comparable nominal terms increased during the biennium 2000-2001 by 2.4 per cent and in the biennium 2002-2003 by 2.3 per cent against the actual 1998-1999 costs. In this situation, temporary assistance for meetings resources, which was initially intended to deal with peaks of workload in the current biennium, was fully committed to accommodate the general increase in demand for services.

8. The data also reveals that, in part, resources of the Department are also utilized for purposes outside the servicing of the United Nations conferences and meetings, namely for translation of non-parliamentary documentation, such as the *United Nations Treaty Series* and the translation of publications. This has diverted some of the capacity of the Department from the main goal of implementing the provisions of resolution 56/242. The Secretariat intends to address further the issue of specific requirements for these particular purposes in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

9. Furthermore, the experience of the first quarter of 2002 has indicated that the number of meetings for 2002 will exceed the projected level, due, in part, to the additional mandate adopted by the Security Council in its resolution 1373 (2001) of 28 September 2001 on the activities of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. The additional conference and common support services requirements arising from that resolution have been addressed in a separate report (A/C.5/56/42). It has therefore become problematic to accommodate, within existing capacity, not only the requested meetings with interpretation for regional and other major groupings of Member States, but also to service the meetings already programmed in the United Nations calendar for the current biennium. In addition, this situation does not allow for measures within existing resources to mitigate the delay with issuance of verbatim and summary records.

10. With regard to servicing of requested meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, it should be noted that, so far, the practice has been that these meetings have not been programmed in the biennial calendar of the conferences and meetings of the United Nations. Services to such meetings, including interpretation services, have been provided on an as available basis. The statistics on servicing of these meetings indicate a rapid expansion. These statistics on a number of such meetings held at Headquarters and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi can be seen in the table below (see A/56/213 and Corr.1 for further details).

	Interpretation services			*Conference facilities*	
	Requested	*Provided*	*Not provided*	*Requested*	*Provided*
July 2000-June 2001	318	291	27	1 464	1 464
July 1999-June 2000	321	269	52	1 194	1 194
July 1998-June 1999	314	262	52	909	909

11. The General Assembly may wish to programme meetings of regional and other major groupings in the biennial calendar, thus facilitating the programming of the available conference-servicing resources and related conference facilities. However, corresponding resources for interpretation and support services of such meetings would have to be included within the programme budget. Based on the above meeting statistics, and assuming that the above frequency of meetings would be maintained, it has been estimated that resource requirements for Headquarters and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi would range from $12 to $15 million.

12. The other essential component of meeting services is provided by the Office of Central Support Services at Headquarters and by the local administrations at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. Those services include sound engineering, security and conference-room services and related proportional costs for cleaning and utilities. At Headquarters alone, based on established standards, the notional cost of common support services to scheduled meetings is estimated at $24.2 million for the biennium 2002-2003.

13. The operational components within the proposed programme budget of the Office of Central Support Services for the biennium 2002-2003 amounted to $148,056,600. These funds were proposed for various contractual services, general

operating expenses, supplies and equipment for Headquarters infrastructure requirements, including support to the United Nations conferences and meetings to be held at Headquarters. The initial appropriation for the biennium 2002-2003, as approved by the General Assembly, amounted to $126,376,600, or a reduction of $21,680,000 (14.6 per cent) under proposed operational requirements. Those reductions reflect the proportional effect on the budget of the Office of the reductions imposed by paragraph 70 of resolution 56/253. Similar but lesser reductions have been effected against the estimated requirements for administrative services at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. Within this reduced capacity, support services to meetings could be provided only during normal working hours, while the scale and composition of such services will have to be reduced.

14. Finally, the scope of coverage of the meetings of the General Assembly and the Security Council provided by the Department of Public Information has also been affected by the budget cuts imposed by resolution 56/253, including a reduction in specialized services and contractual engineering support to press, television and radio coverage of meetings. The requirement for these services was initially proposed by the Secretary-General in the amount of $12,667,000, reflecting some reduction against the previous biennium. The further reduction in the amount of $1,270,000, or 10 per cent of the estimated requirements, imposed by resolution 56/253 has resulted in reduced coverage of the meetings and a delay in the production of press releases.

15. In summary, the analysis of the existing capacity and the level of available resources vis-à-vis the established programme of conferences and meetings and the legal obligations of the Organization indicates that it is not possible to restore the services to Member States to the previous level without additional resources. A further increase in the productivity of the Secretariat cannot be expected. Over the last three bienniums the Secretariat has made significant increases in its productivity in order to cope with the stagnant budget level, and those efforts have been directed towards servicing the expanded mandates of the Organization (see annex). Further increases in productivity will be minimal, given that the budget for information technology resources, which underpinned most of the efforts to improve productivity, has been cut by $10 million. The Secretariat has, therefore, been left with no option but to reduce services as explained to Member States in the Secretary-General's note verbale dated 28 February 2002.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

16. **With the present level of resources, the Secretariat will continue to provide servicing for the meetings scheduled in the calendar of the conferences and meetings of the United Nations for the biennium 2002-2003, within normal working hours and at the level of service detailed in ST/IC/2002/13.**

17. **Proposals for formalizing conference servicing of meetings of the regional and other major groupings of Member States could be further developed for the consideration of the General Assembly if Member States so desire. In the meantime, services for regional and other major groupings will be provided on an as available basis in accordance with established practice.**

18. In the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, proposals for mitigating delay in the issuance of verbatim and summary records will be considered to the extent appropriate. Furthermore, specific proposals in respect of resources required for the translation of non-parliamentary documentation and United Nations publications will also be reviewed in the context of the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

19. It is recommended that the General Assembly take note of the measures outlined in paragraphs 16 to 18 above.

Annex

Analysis of the workload of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services in relation to its actual expenditures

	*1992-1993**	*1994-1995**	*1996-1997*	*1998-1999*	*2000-2001*	*2002-2003*
No. of meetings with interpretation	13 092	14 497	13 102	13 173	14 237	14 545
No. of meetings without interpretation	10 564	12 259	14 733	16 594	17 430	18 384
Total no. meetings	**23 656**	**26 756**	**27 835**	**29 767**	**31 667**	**32 929**
No. of interpreter assignments	130 370	151 042	133 164	130 453	142 731	140 540
Translation services (no. of pages)	1 101 348	1 056 839	958 752	1 041 845	1 072 430	1 088 179
Editorial services (no. of pages)	384 388	454 058	490 033	477 270	460 152	468 276
Reproduction (no. of pages)	6 931 185	7 172 170	5 297 294	4 938 545	5 077 894	5 074 245
Total final expenditures (thousands of United States dollars)	**409 903.8**	**456 802.3**	**457 704.0**	**439 587.3**	**450 057.1**	**449 775.3****
Average cost per meeting (United States dollars)	17 328	17 073	16 443	14 768	14 212	13 659

* Excluding Nairobi to ensure comparability.

** Initial appropriation.